

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA NIACT IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, PN

SUBJECT: PANAMA CANAL TREATIES PRESS REPORT

REF: EMBASSY'S REQUEST 091117

1. FOLLOWING ARE PRESS ARTICLES ON PANAMA TAKEN FROM SUNDAY, APRIL 9 NEW YORK TIMES.
2. NEW YORK TIMES, PAGE 3: "BYRD WARNS AGAINST OVER-REACTING TO PANAMA MOVE ON TREATY CHANGE" (PICTURE OF EFFIGY BURNING)

QUOTE

WASHINGTON APRIL 8 -- ROBERT C. BYRD, THE SENATE MAJORITY LEADER, WARNED TODAY AGAINST "OVERREACTING" TO PANAMA'S RECENT DIPLOMATIC MANEUVERING IN RESPONSE TO SENATE CHANGES IN THE FIRST PANAMA CANAL TREATY. HE PREDICTED THAT PANAMA'S MANEUVERS WOULD SOT (SIC.) AFFECT PROSPECTS FOR APPROVAL OF THE SECOND TREATY.

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"I THINK THIS WOULD BE A GOOD TIME FOR US TO COOL IT AND KEEP OUR EYE ON THE MERITS OF THE TREATY," WEST VIRGINIA DEMOCRAT SAID AT A BREAKFAST MEETING WITH REPORTERS.

PRESIDENT CARTER, HOWEVER, EXPRESSED APPREHENSION ABOUT PANAMA'S RECENT LETTER TO OTHER GOVERNMENT CITING ITS

"DEEP CONCERN" ABOUT A SENATE RESERVATION ATTACHED TO THE FIRST TREATY. THE PRESIDENT SAID IN REMARKS MADE TO NEWS EXECUTIVES AT THE WHITE HOUSE YESTERDAY AND ISSUED TODAY THAT SENATE APPROVAL OF THE TREATY "HANGS BY A THREAD."

'COULD ENDANGER PASSAGE'

"ANY STATEMENT, EVEN IF IT IS WELL BASED, BY THE PANAMANIAN THAT WOULD CAUSE CONSTERNATION OR DOUBT IN THE MINDS OF U.S. SENATORS COULD VERY WELL ENDANGER THE PASSAGE OF THE SECOND TREATY," MR. CARTER SAID.

SENATOR BYRD TOLD REPORTERS THE LETTER REFLECTED ONLY "A VENTING OF SOME PRESSURES" BY THE PANAMANIAN AND SAID HE HAS HAD NO INDICATION THAT PANAMA WOULD NOT APPROVE THE TREATY IF IT COSTAINED (SIC.) THE RESERVATION.

PANAMA'S LETTER TO FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS AND A SIMILAR DOCUMENT CIRCULATED TO UNITED NATIONS MISSIONS CONCERNED A TREATY RESERVATION THAT WOULD ALLOW UNITED STATES TROOPS TO MOVE IN IF THE CANAL WAS SHUT DOWN BY A STRIKE. THE RESERVATION IN THE FIRST TREATY, WHICH WAS APPROVED BY THE REQUIRED TWO-THIRDS VOTE IN THE SENATE WITH ONLY A SINGLE VOTE TO SPARE, WAS SPONSORED BY SENATOR DENNIS DECONCINI, DEMOCRAT OF ARIZONA.

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DECONCINI IS PUZZLED

SENATOR DECONCINI SAID YESTERDAY HE WAS PUZZLED BY THE PANAMANIAN MOVE, ADDING THAT HE MIGHT ASK PANAMA FOR CLARIFICATION AS TO WHETHER IT WOULD ACCEPT HIS RESERVATION. BUT SENATOR BYRD, THE MAJORITY LEADER, SAID SUPPORTERS OF THE TREATY HAD NOT COME TO HIM TO REQUEST SUCH A CLARIFICATION. NOR DID HE BELIEVE THERE WOULD BE ANY MOVE TO WEAKEN OR RECONSIDER THE DECONCINI RESERVATION.

BOTH PRESIDENT CARTER AND SENATOR BYRD EMPHASIZED THAT THE DECONCINI RESERVATION DID NOT ALTER THE ADMINISTRATION'S PLEDGE TO BRIG. YEN. (SIC.) OMAR TORRIJOS HERRERA, PANAMA'S HEAD OF GOVERNMENT, OF NONINTERVENTION IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF PANAMA.

SENATOR BYRD ALSO SAID PANAMA'S MOVE WOULD NOT DELAY THE VOTE ON THE SECOND TREATY, NOW SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 18.

FIRST TREATY ON NEUTRALITY

THE FIRST TREATY GUARANTEES THE CANAL'S NEUTRALITY, WHILE THE SECOND DEALS WITH TURNING THE WATERWAY OVER TO PANAMA IN THE YEAR 2000.

SENATOR BYRD SAID HE DISCUSSED THE CANAL TREATIES YESTERDAY ON THE TELEPHONE WITH PRESIDENT CARTER. HE SAID THAT THEY AGREED ON THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING ,OUR EYES ON THE BALL," THAT IS, ON THE TREATIES RATHER THAN PANAMA'S REACTIONS.

IN ANOTHER MATTER, THE SENATOR SAID HE BELIEVED EUROPEAN RELUCTANCE TO DEPLOY THE CONTROVERSIAL NUTRON BOMB WAS "A VERY CRITICAL FACTOR" IN PRESIDENT CARTER'S DECISION TO DELAY PRODUCTION OF THE HIGH-RADIATION WARHEAD.
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"I THINK IT IS IRONIC, IF NOT ALARMING, THAT OUR ALLIES WERE WILLING TO PLAY ONE OF OUR TRUMP CARDS AS A THROW-AWAY IN THE HIGH STAKES GAME OF WORLD SECURITY," HE SAID.

3. NEW YORK TIMES, PAGE 2 E, THE NATION, IN SUMMARY:
"PANAMA HAS RESERVATIONS"

IT WAS THE DIPLOMATIC EQUIVALENT OF A SLOW BURN. AFTER THREE WEEKS OF SILENCE, PANAMA WAS UNWILLING TO CONTAIN ITSELF ANY LONGER, AND LAST WEEK IT CIRCULATED A LETTER AT THE UNITED NATIONS COMPLAINING ABOUT A RESERVATION THAT THE UNITED STATES SENATE HAD ADDED TO THE PANAMA CANAL NEUTRALITY TREATY. HOWEVER, THE LETTER STOPPED SIGNIFICANTLY SHORT OF SAYING THAT PANAMA WOULD NOW REJECT THE TREATY AND THEREBY UPEND THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S MOST IMPORTANT FOREIGN POLICY ACHIEVEMENT.

THERE NEVER WAS ANY DOUBT THAT THE PANAMANIAN LEADER, BRIG. GEN. OMAR TORRIJOS HERRERA, DISLIKED THE RESERVATION, WHICH ASSERTS THE UNITED STATES RIGHT TO SEND IN TROOPS IF THE CANAL IS CLOSED FOR ANY REASON. THEN WHY SEND THE LETTER? POSSIBLY SO GENERAL TORRIJOS COULD SEE HOW MUCH INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT HE MIGHT HAVE IF HE DOES DECIDE TO REJECT THE RESERVATION, POSSIBLY TO WARN THE SENATE AGAINST TINKERING WITH THE OTHER TREATY, TRANSFERRING CONTROL OF THE CANAL TO PANAMA, POSSIBLY TO CONVINCE OTHER PANAMANIAN THAT HE WAS NOT TAKING AN UNPOPULAR NORTH AMERICAN ACTION LYING DOWN.

WHATEVER THE MOTIVE, THE LETTER LED TO FAST BURNS ON CAPITOL HILL, ESPECIALLY AMONG TREATY SUPPORTERS. THEY
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THOUGHT THE TIMING WAS AWFUL, GIVEN THE FACT THAT THE
NEUTRALITY AGREEMENT PASSED WITH ONLY ONE VOTE TO SPARE.
IT CAN ONLY CONFUSE, THEY BELIEVE, THE PROSPECTS FOR
THE SECOND TREATY WHEN IT COMES UP FOR A FINAL VOTE NEXT
WEEK.

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4. UNDERSTAND WASHINGTON POST APRIL 9 EDITORIAL
"RESERVATIONS ABOUT DECONCINI" SENT TO YOU BY ICA.

5. MESSAGE SERIES ON PRESS REPORTS APRIL 9 ENDS. VANCE

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